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SEWEE

VISITOR

CENTER

The Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge covers about 64,000 acres along the Atlantic coast and adjoins the Francis Marion National Forest. The refuge occupies mostly offshore property, with about 20 acres on the mainland, at Moore's Landing. Salt marsh and islands characterize the refuge, preserving naturally-occurring coastal habitat. The refuge helps protect loggerhead turtle eggs and provides nesting habitat for shore birds. It is the site of efforts to reestablish the red wolf. Migratory waterfowl use it for a winter habitat. Many visitors enjoy Bull Island, reached by concessionaire-provided boats. Other refuge areas are reached by private boats. Wildlife observation, fishing, hiking and beach combing are popular.

The Francis Marion National Forest occupies 250,000 acres next to the Cape Romaine National Wildlife Refuge. The wildlife habitats in the forest vary from the coastal marsh to swamp to upland southern pine stands. This area is one of the largest blocks of relatively natural coastal plain forest remaining in the United States. Diverse plant and animal communities are found, including many sensitive and endangered species. The endangered red-cockaded woodpecker is a prominent example, and is the object of many efforts to increase its numbers on this forest.

Most recreational use of the forest will be concentrated along U.S. Highway 17, linking Charleston and Myrtle Beach. Plans include a major auto tour route, bike trail, hiking trail, and a canoe trail starting near the visitor center. A major campground will be developed at nearby Walnut Grove.

Hurricane Hugo swept through the area in 1989. The storm nearly destroyed the old-growth pines and most recreation facilities. Promotion of greater recreational use of the forest and wildlife refuge could help replace employment and income opportunities once found in the forest's wealth of commercial timber. This recreation replacement also coincides with a rapidly growing convention business in Charleston. The suburbs are also growing rapidly between Charleston and the site of the new visitor center, as a result of a new highway bridge. These residents, as well as tourists, represent a potential clientele whose interest in the site should be stimulated by the new center.

The center will serve three main purposes:

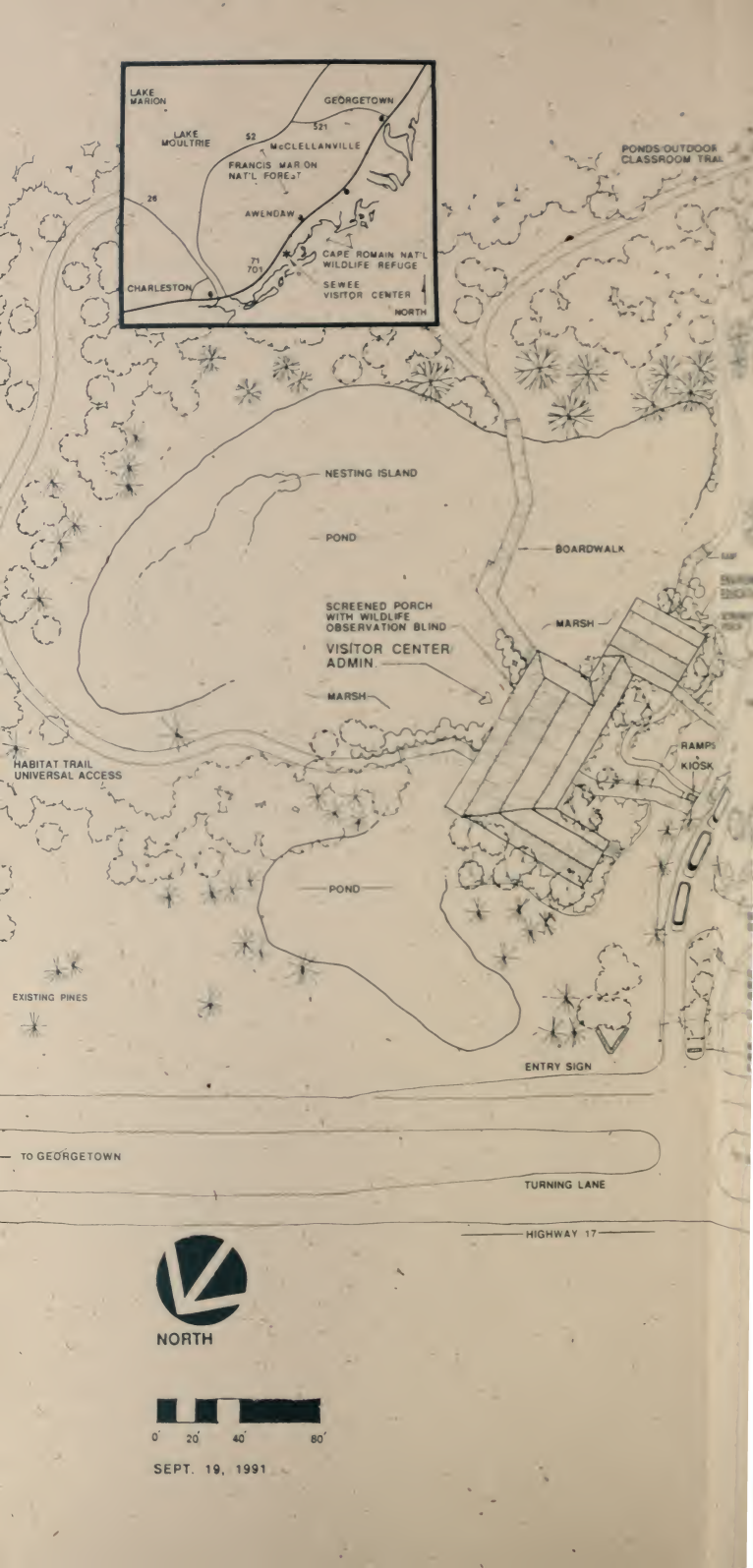
- Interpretation and information for the general public
- Conservation education for regional youth
- Orientation for natural-resource management professionals

Charleston is renowned for its historic attractions, but heretofore has had no facility like the proposed center to promote its rich natural history and outdoor recreational attractions. In fact, there is no other facility in the Charleston region where visitors have the opportunity to discover the story of natural resource management in the coastal and upland ecosystems. The center will fill this gap, encouraging many recreational activities such as camping, picnicking, hiking and fishing. It will also present interpretive opportunities such as auto tours, historic sites and wildlife observation on and near the Forest Bend Wildlife Refuge.

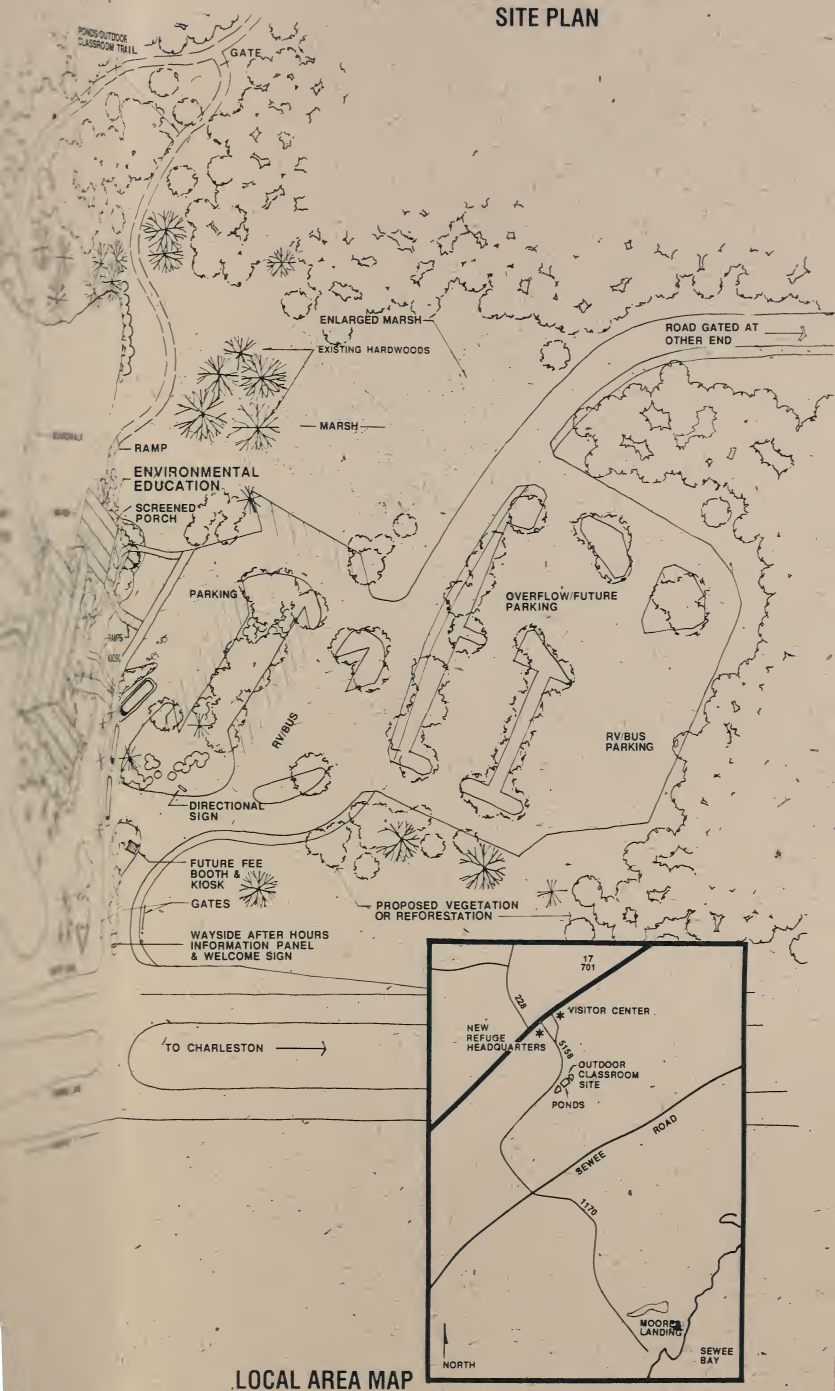
The center will be the hub for a major conservation education program for the three-county area surrounding the forest. Presently, few opportunities exist for schools and other youth organizations to discover the natural values of the coastal and upland ecosystems of the South Carolina coast.

The center will serve as an orientation site for natural resource management professionals or students visiting the region. The Forest Service's leadership in southern pine timber management and the presence of an experiment station create a great appeal to visiting foresters and biologists. The wildlife refuge's loggerhead turtle nursery program provides an unusual attraction for wildlife managers.

These opportunities, combined with Charleston's convention facilities, will provide a continuing draw to the center. The presence within the region of other major natural resource facilities such as Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the Great Smokey Mountains National Park, and the Cradle of Forestry should make the center, the forest and refuge a "must see" for many university field trips.


LAKE MARION
GEORGETOWN
LAKE MOULTRIE
52
521
McCLELLANVILLE
FRANCIS MARION NAT'L FOREST
26
AWENDAW
71
701
CAPE ROMAIN NAT'L WILDLIFE REFUGE
CHARLESTON
SEWEE VISITOR CENTER
NORTH
PONDS-OUTDOOR CLASSROOM TRAIL
NESTING ISLAND
POND
BOARDWALK
SCREENED PORCH WITH WILDLIFE OBSERVATION BLIND
MARSH
VISITOR CENTER ADMIN.
MARSH
RAMPS
KIOSK
HABITAT TRAIL UNIVERSAL ACCESS
POND
EXISTING PINES
ENTRY SIGN
TO GEORGETOWN
TURNING LANE
HIGHWAY 17
NORTH
0' 20' 40' 80'
SEPT. 19, 1991

SEWEE VISITOR CENTER
SITE PLAN



LOCAL AREA MAP

THE PROPOSAL

A center is envisioned, offering much-needed services to inform and promote greater public appreciation of the natural and visual riches of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and the Francis Marion National Forest. The center will be jointly operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. It will be located on the Francis Marion National Forest, next to U.S. Highway 17. The site is about 18 miles northeast of downtown Charleston, S.C. It will serve an estimated 200,000 visitors per year.

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INTERPRETIVE THEMES

1. Natural resource management

2. Endangered and threatened species

3. Wildlife habitat management, and reintroduction of species

4. Prehistoric, historic and cultural resources

5. Mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, the establishment of Cape Romain and the Francis Marion National Forest.

6. The climate and Hurricane Hugo.

7. Orientation to features and recreation opportunities in the surrounding area.

8. What the public can do to help wildlife at home.

These themes should help visitors develop an overall understanding for the flavor of the South Carolina Low Country. Visitors will gain a greater understanding of the management activities and recreation opportunities that abound in the area.

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